

# Action Research on College English Writing Based on Information Technology from the Perspective of Moocs

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## Abstract

The educational reform based on information technology at college has been paid high attention recently in China, which aims at using educational informationization to drive educational modernization and bringing online education into the reform and development strategy of the overall higher education. To promote the educational informatization is not only the inevitable choice of the reform and development of Chinese education; it is also an important means and way to realize the internationalization of the education development.

In the background of the development of education system, for the reality is that the teaching way in our university is basically the traditional teaching mode, the paper is to do action research on college English writing based on information technology from the perspective of Moocs. This paper mainly discusses how to filter to use information technology in network teaching environment in order to help teachers build education concept in the information age, and guide students to truly put themselves into autonomous learning and mobile learning, so as to improve students' innovative writing ability.

**Keywords:** information technology, writing teaching practice, action research

## 1. Introduction

MOOCs arose in the United States in 2012, initiated by many top universities, setting up the network platform, and providing free courses on the Internet. In recent years, our country also starts paying more attention to information construction of colleges and universities, promoting education modernization by education information to include online education in higher education development strategy in the whole reform. "National medium and long-term education reform and development plan outline (2010-2020)" points out that "information technology has a revolutionary influence on education development; promote the teaching content; modernize teaching means and methods....; strengthen the development and application of high quality education resources, construct network teaching resources system; open up network courses, etc." Therefore, to promote education information is not only the inevitable choice of the reform and development of Chinese education, and it is also an important means and way to realize the development of education internationalization.

Our university is a comprehensive and national university, with a total of 20000 students including 8000 students in the first and second years learning college English course, and the teaching way is fundamentally traditional teaching mode. Therefore, our research project group apply for the action research based on MOOCs platform from the angle of information and technology. The research aims to mainly discuss how to cultivate students' English writing ability and improve students' innovative thinking ability in network teaching environment.

## 2. The Problem Analysis

### 2.1 The Original Observation

In our university public English writing classes during their first and second grades, we found that no matter what the writing topic is, most of the students can only use the most simple, and colloquial words, use the basic sentence patterns, and write impromptu. Whether on language or structure, they can not meet the requirements of curriculum standard for it really needs to improve students' writing ability further in order to meet their demand of passing CET 4/6, and lay a foundation for their professional writing in the future. Therefore, we have a selection to use information technology to guide the students to write, help teachers to build education concept in

the information age, and make students truly put themselves into autonomous learning and mobile learning so as to improve their writing ability.

## 2.2 The Original Reflection

Based on this, we initially make the following assumptions:

1. Teachers lack the systematic arrangement of writing teaching.
2. Teachers lack new and creative ideas in teaching methods.
3. Sometimes teachers do correction and feedback work with delay.
4. Students' vocabulary knowledge is poor and they lack writing enthusiasm.
5. Students lack systematic writing learning and training.
6. Students lack autonomous learning ability and innovative thinking ability

## 3. Cohort 1 (4 Classes, 215 Students)

### 3.1 Planning and Action

There are generally 4 steps in our action research on improving college students' writing ability and skills based on web-based teaching platforms as displaying in the following Table 1.

- 1) Train the English teachers in College Foreign Languages Department to help them learn how to produce micro-lessons, popularize micro-lessons and improve the teachers' ideas about online teaching.
- 2) Design questionnaires for students to check their understanding and grasp about the English writing knowledge and skills.
- 3) Produce micro-lessons on web-based teaching platforms.
- 4) Study on students' before-measurement writing and after-measurement writing and exhibit students' excellent writings.

Table 1. Schedule

Time	Contents	Data collection
Dec.2014-Feb.2015	Train teachers to learn how to produce micro-lessons, assign certain teachers as students' writing tutors and do questionnaires on students' writing knowledge	Students' questionnaires
Mar.2015-Aug.2015	Make micro-lessons referring to word, sentence, paragraph, essay and figures of speech	Teaching Micro-lessons
Sep.2015-Jan.2016	Release relevant micro-lessons, power point and other materials on web-based teaching platforms, students' learning and students' applied practice	Students' writings
Feb.2016-May.2016	Study on students' before-measurement writing and after-measurement writing and exhibit students' excellent writings	Students' writings

### 3.2 Observation and Findings

For the first step, all the English teachers have received training on how to make micro-lessons and some of them are assigned as students' tutors to specialize in teaching students' writing by means of web-based teaching platforms. These teachers have access to take use of online teaching platforms as fully as possible. They can utilize at most three web-based teaching platforms for students to repeatedly carry out their writing practice. In contrast with the earlier times for students' writing, students can train their writing practice as much as they can which is to effectively improve the initiative of their autonomic learning and their learning outcome. Meanwhile, it is as well easier to cultivate students' interests in their writing because besides traditional paper writing, they have another new writing channel-online writing by which they can not only focus on their own writing but also appreciate others to get some extra insights; they needn't wait at the certain time or wait for a longer time to get teachers' advices but get them more freely and promptly.

Moreover, through the questionnaires by students, we can easily know about their necessities in their writing.

Take their questionnaires as an example in which we can see most of them do not take the writing as a systematic whole while they see it separately and especially pay more attention to vocabulary choices instead of other writing elements. Therefore, based on the survey of students' questionnaires, we intentionally make micro-lessons and prepare for materials referring to word, sentence, paragraph, figures of speech and essay.

After releasing these relevant micro-lessons, power point and other materials on web-based teaching platform, students can clearly identify all the elements concluded in writing and when they put themselves again in writing practice, they are capable of mapping out their writing in structure more explicitly and composing their writing in content more authentically.

Table 2. Questionnaire

About Writing		
I. Question and Answer: How many parts do you think are there in a piece of writing?		
II. True or False	1. There are three writing perspectives: whole-passage, inter-paragraph and inner-paragraph.	2. There are three common writing genres-narration, exposition and argumentation.
III. Short Answers	1. Can you list at least 3 types of writing techniques?	2. Try to identify the following different figures of speech.

Let's have a look at an example by a student after his learning about word, sentence and paragraph writing and practicing them repeatedly through micro-lessons on web-based teaching platform.

Example: If he had considered clearly before he did it, it's doubtful if he would have made the tragedy happened. This incident give us the shock-and, more importantly, the introspection-to rethink our education.

No considering its two grammar errors (underlined), let's just focus on its word choice, sentence structure and paragraph type, and it's no doubt creative and satisfying paragraph writing. There are only two sentences in this short paragraph but with two different sentence structures-a compound sentence and a complex sentence. What's more, there are altogether 4 beautiful word choices and 1 phrase connector (incident, shock, introspection, rethink and more importantly). Meanwhile, the student has employed cause-effect inner-paragraph writing technique to build this short paragraph. Overall, it is so gratifying for us to see that it's effective for students' writing after their web-based learning.

Table 3. Micro-lessons

Micro-lessons					
How to write well? -Word	How to write sentence? -Simple/Compound/Complex	How to write paragraph? -Types of paragraph	How to write essay? -Narration/Exposition/Argumentation	-	Figures of Speech

### 3.3 Reflection

Through the first circle, though most students get progress in their English writing, there exists a phenomenon that is more active the students are, more achievement the students get. There is still a portion of students who are inactive in their writing practice. Besides, it is likely for students to neglect that the writing is an organic whole and sometimes they seem to miss certain element in their writing. In view of this, we carry out the second circle.

## 4. Cohort II (4 Classes, 215 Students)

### 4.1 Plan and Action

In this circle, we put students of each class into groups and when we give students writing assignment, it means the writing should be prepared and finished in the name of the group. For instance, just take one of my classes as

an example; it is a middle-sized class with 45 students and they are grouped into 9 groups and for each group there are about 5 group members. After their learning on web-based teaching platform, I just assign them to compose a writing prepared by group and it means every member within the group should cooperate with each other, confirm their individual duty of writing and conform to the writing elements introduced on micro-lessons. And next class, there is a flipped-class; the students should be scored according to their group performance. For example: it is Group 1. (Group Member=GM)

Table 4. Group writing work

GM1	GM2	GM3	GM4	GM5
Brainstorm and Outline	Vocabulary Choice	Paragraph1 and Figures of Speech	Paragraph 2,3	Essay Polishing

#### 4.2 Observation and Findings

In this circle, we find that we can operate the fourth step of Table 1: Schedule very well. There are many merits for students' writing in groups. They are as following:

- 1) It's extremely effective to encourage every group member to participate in writing.
- 2) It aims to cover nearly every group member's improvement in writing.
- 3) It's greatly useful to promote flipped classes.

In the following part, through a comparative study on students' writing models in before-measurement test and after-measurement test, it is obvious for us to see students' improvement in their comprehensive writing ability.

A: Model in before-measurement test: presonal car.

Now, people's life become more and more great , in other word people's money have more and more rich, so people have been begining a new life that is more wonderfull and comfortable. Today, lots of people wonder their own car in China, though they are not enought to buy one. In China , other people will look high on you if you have a car, and there are special things that chinese mothers wouldnot let their dauger marry with a man who he donot have a preson car . And having a car is so comfortable, you can have a picne on weekend; you can go to fishing; you can have a tirp with car, and so many on. In my way, i think that have a car is not very well, only the oil can make the car moving, so taking lots of CO<sub>2</sub> after the oil burned, and it is bad for city, we can take a bike that we want to go, and we can be stronger. This is all my thought.

B: Model in after-measurement test: The role of the teacher in leaning.

As we all know teachers play a role in our study life and always help us.

In our daily life, teachers might have helped our study but only ourselves could have hold the pivotal knowledge that...has...on the survival and... However, if we had been able to..., it is doubtful if we would have improved our performance. Generally speaking, we are certain that...on purpose, but...All the time, the teacher gives us knowledge-and more importantly, learning methods-benefits for good.

Up to now, it's a relief to know that the performance...gave us the highest honor it had earlier denied us.

From the above students' writing models, we can clearly see students' improvement from a comprehensive sense in their writing, which is surely beneficial for their future English study, test and performance.

#### 4.3 Reflection

Even though students have reaped a lot in web-based teaching mode, it's inevitable to see there still exists some problems and difficulties to overcome, for instance some students' weak grammatical foundation, students' disposable time outside their compulsory courses for their repeated writing practice and teachers and students' adjustment to the new teaching methodology from the perspective of information reform in education etc.

#### 5. Conclusion

This action research starts from writing teaching reality, through the survey and study on web-based teaching mode, in view of the toughest problems faced by teachers and students. It explores a new research on teaching and learning. We have tried to bring micro-lectures into writing classes, combine with various types of language learning, teach language knowledge meaningfully targeted with writing out-putting, and appreciate texts from the angle of writing which makes students improve a lot in language acquisition, get effective guidance in

language application, cultivate favorite writing habit and more importantly, realize the benefits from the combination of writing practice and language learning. Surely, they are starting to take use of this method and thought in the process of their lifelong study. This action research is near the end, while the authentic research journey is just unfolding. Being a teacher, in front of us, there is a long way to go, search and persist for good.

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